



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on February 6, 2024

Expecting Workplace Professionalism From Blacks Is Oppression, Say “Experts”

It has already been said that qualities such as punctuality and industriousness are “white norms” that shouldn’t be expected of black students. Now here’s another entry for the “How Much More Can They Hobble the Black Community?” file:

Some “experts” are saying that professionalism at work — which they pejoratively call “code-switching” — takes a toll on black Americans and should not be expected of them. They should be able to “be themselves” in the workplace, is the idea.

USA Today’s Jessica Guynn has the story, [writing](#):



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As one of the few Black women in the corporate offices where she worked, Regina Lawless took pains to blend in. She donned conservative blazers and low-wedge heels and tucked her hair in a wig instead of wearing natural hairstyles or braids.

Echoing the speech patterns of her white colleagues, she avoided African American Vernacular English, spoke in a quieter voice and buttoned down her mannerisms. Even in casual moments around the watercooler, she constantly monitored how she carried herself and chatted about the latest episode of “Game of Thrones,” not “Insecure.”

“I was coming in as a young Black woman and I didn’t want them to think of me as unprofessional or ghetto or pick your negative stereotype of Black women,” she said. “It was my way not to have people question my competence or my professionalism.”

For many Black and Brown workers, this is as routine or familiar as breathing. Lawless was “code-switching,” meaning she changed her appearance, speech and behavior to fit in and put others at ease.

“Had I not code-switched and conformed, I would not have been seen as having leadership potential,” said Lawless, whose last corporate job was as head of diversity, equity and inclusion at Instagram.

But the mental gymnastics came at a cost.

That cost would be, Lawless informs, that she felt worn out from the “cognitive load” she had to bear.

If anyone can now hear the world’s smallest violin playing, so could the Yahoo commenters under Guynn’s [piece](#). For example, respondent “Alibaster” wrote, “Code-switching.....or is it the ability to communicate effectively with colleagues in many facets of your business?”

“We all have to do it,” he continued. “I speak to my close co-workers differently than I do with



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management, customers, vendors. Consider it a skill.”

Another commenter, “Vincent,” informed that he spent 25-plus years in sales at an office and stated:

I had two wardrobes, one for work, and one for when I wasn’t working. I love music, going to concerts, and have a lot of hard rock / heavy metal shirts, hoodies, etc... I like ripped jeans and hiking boots. At work, I dressed nice, I kept my hair clean cut....I could have continued to wear ripped jeans, concert t-shirts, long hair, and talk like it’s the weekend, and I’d also probably be living in my parents basement making just above minimum wage. We all “code-switch:” if we want a better life.

More can be said, however. What Guynn (and so many others) calls “African American Vernacular English” is actually just redneck-speak. In fact, as Professor Thomas Sowell pointed out in his book *Black Rednecks and White Liberals*, the language style dates back 500 years to England — and even then those exhibiting it might be called rednecks or “crackers.”

Now, point to ponder: How well would a white redneck who was just “being himself” and used that vernacular at a corporate office fare? Given the prejudice today against lower-class whites and businesses’ knowledge that firing a black employee can bring a discrimination suit, whom do you think would be shown more deference in such a situation, a white or a black “redneck”?

Guynn also informs that blacks “are nearly three times more likely to code-switch than white employees” — and are still more likely than whites to do so even in “diverse,” politically correct workplaces. Guynn attributes this to anti-black bias, of course. But could the explanation be that, owing to pandering powers that be that perpetuate cultural pathologies, blacks are far more likely to receive a redneck-style upbringing?

In truth, Guynn’s article is just another example of how when all you have is a hammer of grievance, everything looks like a racist nail. Consider how she also mentions that code-switching “is frequently considered a required skill for Black Americans” and cites “a motorist adopting a more deferential tone during a traffic stop” as an example. This is reminiscent of when I gave a speech in Toronto years ago, and the leftist speaking counterpoint to me mentioned that a downside of being non-white was having to feel nervous when a police car was behind you on the road. But who doesn’t feel nervous in that situation?

Likewise, what sane person doesn’t strike a deferential tone during a traffic stop? These are normal phenomena, exhibited by everyone. Only people paranoid and delusional about racism (or who have a persecution complex) could think that they, along with other universal slings and arrows, are unique to only one group.

Of course, though, if the racialsists do believe these realities bedevil only non-whites, is it any surprise they fancy white privilege a thing?

It’s clear that “code-switching” is just another example of giving a normal phenomenon — in this case, adapting appropriately to a situation — a label that provides intellectually bereft writers, ambitious activists, and assorted pseudo-intellectuals something else to bang on about.

As for the “self” in “being yourself,” it should include being a wise person who knows when iconoclasm is imperative — and when conformity is called for.



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